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SUBJECT: BEATING AROUND THE BUSH: STRATEGIES FOR WRITING
ABOUT POLITICS IN A PROGRESSIVE CHINESE MAGAZINE

REF: A) GUANGZHOU 20891; B) GUANGZHOU 20890; C) GUANGZHOU

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(U) THIS MESSAGE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE
HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EDITORIALS IN RECENT
ISSUES OF "CITIZEN" ("SHIMIN"), A POLITICALLY PROGRESSIVE
MAGAZINE THAT WAS STARTED LAST FEBRUARY (REFS A, B AND C),
REVEALS A ROUNABOUT STRATEGY FOR DISCUSSING SENSITIVE
POLITICAL ISSUES IN CHINA. THOUGH IT IS OF COURSE EXTREMELY
RISKY TO ADDRESS FUNDAMENTAL, OVERARCHING PROBLEMS OF THE
CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM DIRECTLY, SUCH AS THE LACK OF
FREEDOM OF SPEECH, "CITIZEN"'S EDITORIALS USUALLY MENTION
THESE ISSUES IN SEEMINGLY UNRELATED CONTEXTS. BY DOING SO,
THE WRITERS ARE ABLE TO INVOKE SENSITIVE TOPICS WHILE
APPEARING TO WRITE ABOUT SEPARATE ISSUES.

THE INDIRECT APPROACH

12. (SBU) A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THIS TYPE OF WRITING IS THE
EDITORIAL IN THE MOST RECENT ISSUE OF "CITIZEN" (JUNE 2006).
ENTITLED "IDEAL HOUSING IN AN OPEN SOCIETY" ("KAIFANG SHEHUI
DE JUZHU LIXIANG"), THE AUTHOR DISCUSSES VARIOUS HOUSING
CONCERNS: A PERSON CANNOT CRITICIZE THE HOUSING CHOICES OF
ANOTHER; ONE HAS A RIGHT TO LIVE NEXT TO CIVILIZED
NEIGHBORS; THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CREATE PLEASANT LIVING
SITUATIONS, ETC. THE ARTICLE GOES ON TO ARGUE THAT PEOPLE
DON'T SIMPLY NEED A PHYSICAL PLACE TO LIVE; THEY NEED A
BETTER COMMUNITY AND A CIVILIZED COUNTRY IN WHICH TO LIVE.
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EDITORIAL, AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION
TAKES PLACE IN WHICH AN AVERAGE CITIZEN ANSWERS QUESTIONS
ABOUT HIS HOUSING IDEALS: HE DESIRES A HOUSE THAT WON'T FALL
DOWN, AND A FRIENDLY, OPEN COMMUNITY, IN A CITY WITH
SUITABLE SCENERY. IN ADDITION, HE WANTS "TO LIVE IN A
NATION THAT ARDENTLY LOVES FREEDOM AND STRONGLY RESPECTS
CULTURE." FREEDOM AND CULTURE SEEM TO HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH
HOUSING, YET THE AUTHOR INCLUDES THEM ANYWAY AS FUNDAMENTAL
ELEMENTS OF AN IDEAL HOUSING SITUATION.

13. (SBU) ANOTHER GOOD ILLUSTRATION OF THIS TYPE OF
OUNABOUT APPROACH TO POLITICAL ISSUES IS THE EDITORIAL IN
THE APRIL ISSUE OF "CITIZEN." THE EDITORIAL, OSTENSIBLY
ABOUT ECONOMIC ISSUES, ARGUES THAT MONOPOLIES SHOULD BE
DISSOLVED IN INDUSTRIES SUCH AS HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION, REAL
ESTATE, RAILROADS, PETROLEUM, AIRLINES, AND EVEN BUTCHERY.
IN THE FINAL PARAGRAPH, HOWEVER, THE AUTHOR DEPARTS FROM
MERELY ECONOMIC ISSUES TO SAY:

"TO STRIVE FOR UNIVERSAL RIGHTS IS THE ONLY WAY TO GET RID OF PRIVILEGES. THAT MEANS WE MUST ESTABLISH A SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS PEOPLE TO VOICE THEIR PAIN; WE MUST ESTABLISH AN INCENTIVE POLICY WHICH FORCES THE GOVERNMENT TO PAY ATTENTION TO PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOOD. CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION, DEMOCRATIC POLICY-MAKING, AND SUPERVISION BY THE MASSES ARE ALL VITAL FORCES IN COUNTERING MONOPOLIES. ONE PIECE OF COMMON SENSE IS THAT ONE FREEDOM (CITIZENS' FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING) WOULD HELP REALIZE ANOTHER FREEDOM (FREEDOM OF OPEN MARKET AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM)."

IN THIS EDITORIAL, THEN, THE AUTHOR'S TOPIC IS SUPERFICIALLY AN ECONOMIC ONE: MONOPOLIES. HOWEVER, BY DISCUSSING NOTIONS SUCH AS "CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION" AND "DEMOCRATIC POLICY-MAKING," THE AUTHOR SUCCEEDS IN REFERRING TO SENSITIVE POLITICAL ISSUES WITHIN A SAFER EDITORIAL CONTEXT.

TREATING THE SYMPTOMS

14. (SBU) "CITIZEN"'S EDITORIAL WRITERS USUALLY CHOOSE TO WRITE ABOUT TOPICS THAT THEY BELIEVE ARE DIRECTLY CAUSED BY WHAT THEY REFER TO AS THE LACK OF FREEDOM IN CHINA. BY ADDRESSING THESE MORE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, THEY HOPE TO "TQAT THE SYMPTOMS" OF THIS LACK OF FREEDOM. AN INTELLECTUAL WHO IS INVOLVED WITH "CITIZEN" RECENTLY WROTE AN E-MAIL TO CONGENOFFS THAT INCLUDED THIS STATEMENT: "ALTHOUGH WE CAN NOT OVERTLY SAY THAT THE REGIME IS THE TROUBLE MAKER, WE CAN TELL THE PUBLIC FRANKLY WHAT TROUBLES THE REGIME HAS BROUGHT TO US." HE EXPLAINED OUTRIGHT THE STRATEGY OF "CITIZEN" IN BRINGING ABOUT POLITICAL CHANGE: DISCUSSING PROBLEMS IN CHINA WITHOUT DIRECTLY MENTIONING THE CAUSE OF THOSE PROBLEMS.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) BY APPROACHING SENSITIVE ISSUES IN A ROUNDABOUT MANNER, "CITIZEN"'S EDITORS AND WRITERS ARE CLEARLY TRYING TO GET AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THEM WITHOUT CROSSING THE SOMETIMES MURKY LINE OF WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE AND WHAT IS NOT. THE STRATEGY OF ASSOCIATING CONCEPTS SUCH AS "FREEDOM" AND "DEMOCRACY" WITH MORE EVERYDAY PROBLEMS LIKE HOUSING AND MONOPOLIES ALSO CORRESPONDS TO THE EDITORS' GOAL OF "LAYING THE GROUNDWORK" FOR POLITICAL CHANGE IN CHINA, AS MENTIONED IN A PREVIOUS MEETING (REF C). THESE EDITORIALS DO NOT MERELY DISCUSS THESE PROBLEMS; THEY DISCUSS THEM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LARGER ISSUE OF THE LACK OF FREEDOM IN CHINA. IN THIS WAY, THE EDITORS MAY HOPE TO INCORPORATE THESE KINDS OF NOTIONS INTO EVERYDAY, FUNDAMENTAL THINKING, IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE THEM A PART OF NORMAL THOUGHT PROCESSES. HOWEVER, TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN REACHING THE MASSES, THE READERSHIP OF "CITIZEN" WOULD HAVE TO INCREASE DRAMATICALLY. END COMMENT.

MARTIN